

SEPARATE STATES

Project Proposal



Ewan Macbeth

Directors Statement

In the past six years acid related violence has increased in London six-fold and is averaging at two attacks a day. This violence, usually between men and gang related, is designed by its perpetrators to destroy a victim's identity. Violence in the UK has risen exponentially for the past ten years, in tandem with a programme of harsh austerity enforced by the British government, and across most of Europe, since the financial crash of 2008. This has inadvertently harmed the poorest sections of society, helping to perpetuate the rise in crime.

Public perception on acid attacks is also wildly misinformed due to its portrayal in tabloid journalism and racial prejudices. Newspapers have made acid attacks synonymous with London's South Asian community, where as in reality, according to statistics published by the London Metropolitan Police, just 6% of all suspects in London over the last 15 years were Asian. Likewise, the London Met have reported that acid attacks are often conflated with so-called 'honour attacks' (usually religious families) carried out predominantly against women. In truth, 67% of all victims are male and only one acid attack in the past 15 years has been deemed to have been carried out as an 'honour attack'.

I see Acid attacks as being a visceral and particularly graphic symptom of deeper issues that exist in Britain and Europe today. I want this film to operate as an allegory for social disintegration as a result of ideologically driven austerity by a political class not in touch with reality. I also, want to raise questions surrounding the role media has in shaping our perceptions of reality.

'Separate States' subverts the media depiction of acid attacks by having it take place between two doppelgängers, representing privileged members of the establishment, those most responsible for the increase in violence. I want to undermine the preconceived ideas surrounding acid violence in the UK, and in turn illuminate some of the absurdities that exist within our political establishment and class system. I decided to employ the doppelgänger motif as it seems to me that the U.K. has a crisis of identity: politically, socially and otherwise.

Separate States further subverts the media's depiction of events by creating an alternate reality, set in a tangible yet uncanny version of Europe. By taking

the narrative out of the U.K. and putting it in an unrecognisable yet clearly western environment it allows the story to become more universal and critique power structures that are not unique to the U.K.

Within this alternate world of 'Separate States,' reality and simulation will become indistinguishable, as theorised by Jean Baudrillard in his text 'Simulacra and simulations.' Umberto Eco described this concept as that of the "authentic fake" not just the imitation of reality, but improving of it. Through the image and sound combination I intend to convey a dream-like narrative, that doesn't follow the rules of reality.

The narrative structure of the film is a loop, with it starting and ending the same way. This is following the theory of the 'eternal return' that time recurs in a loop and fate is predestined. I want the film to convey that the characters are trapped within a false media constructed reality, that they are archetypes, forced to play their part. This loop also further supports the allegory of austerity at the centre of the film and its link to self perpetuating violence.

STORY:

Separate States follows an incident of acid based violence between two doppelgängers, each portraying the same character displaced in time. The film begins with a man having a consultation with his doctor regarding burns he has received. Then seemingly going backwards in time before his attack, we see him receiving a bottle of acid bought online and then preparing to use it as a weapon. The last scene follows the same man paying respects to an ambiguous memorial, then being attacked by his doppelgänger. The start and end are punctuated with a title /credit sequence to convey that the film takes place in a world trapped in a loop.

SYNOPSIS :

Separate states takes place in an unnamed European country; a dystopian alternate reality. The film begins with an abstract title sequence, a distorted portrait that explores the mental state of the unnamed lead character, a burns victim. Then his reality: now wearing a medical mask designed to heal his face, he remains lost in thought as he has a consultation with his Dr who inspects his body.

Now: a flashback to before he was disfigured. Looking slick and oozing privilege he sits in his opulent apartment. He receives a package ordered online, opens it, revealing a bottle of sulphuric acid which he then proceeds to decant into another bottle. Suddenly he pours some of this liquid onto his kitchen table and watches as it violently burns the surface.

Now what appears to be the same man, walks through a town square towards a series of large abstract memorial statues that protrude from the ground. After he pays his respects, it's unclear as to what, he turns round to see his doppelgänger aggressively walking towards him, who then throws acid in his face. Before his face burns: back to the same opening sequence, which shows that time in this world is trapped in a endless loop.

Logline:

In a surreal alternate reality an acid attack victim dwells on the event that disfigured him.

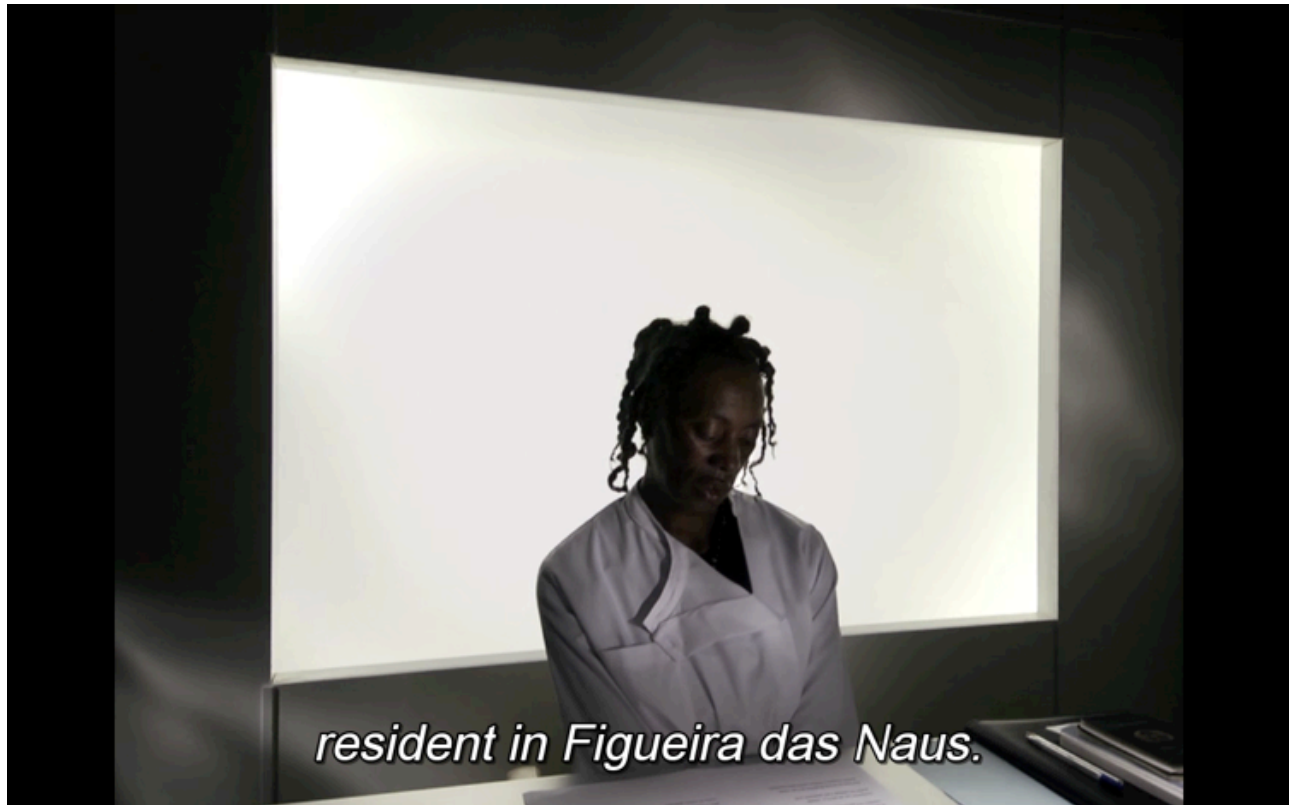
How I want to make it:

I want the film to convey that the characters are trapped within a false constructed reality, that they are actors, forced to play their part. Through the image and sound combination I intend to convey a dream-like narrative, which doesn't follow the rules of reality.

Image:

As with my last film, Divided Together, I want to shoot the film in digital black and white. With this style I create a deadpan atmosphere through

coldness, distance and also clarity of image. We usually associate black and white with the past and digital with the present, so this combination creates an interesting dichotomy. A dichotomy, which is fitting, as this is a story about characters playing different, separate versions of themselves. For the scarring/burns prosthetics will be needed.



resident in Figueira das Naus.

Sound:

Through sound *Separate States* will further create a dreamlike world of a character trapped within their mental state. The only dialogue featured is a voice over, of the characters thoughts, with a composed soundtrack over the action, obscuring what the characters say on screen. I would like to collaborate with a musician, who will compose a soundtrack especially for the film, responding to the images and editing to create something uniquely tailored to the project. I want something akin to the contemporary soundtrack Nicholas Jaar did for 'The Colour of Pomegranates'. I am doing this, as I want to create a film that is a non-verbal experience, an image based film.

Timetable:

I will shoot the second week of may, with a shooting time for the film running to around two days. I have location scouted for the film and found the location for the final scene (Visserijplein), and written the script based around it. I have also found a penthouse apartment owner willing to let me film in their apartment for the middle scene. That leaves only the Dr's Surgery location missing. The title/credit sequence will be filmed in a studio at my school.



Visserijplein, Rotterdam.

Relation to previous work

My work currently focuses on exploring the relationship between reality vs. simulation and propaganda vs. empire. *Separate States* is set in the same cinematic world I created in *'Divided Together* (2018), an alternate reality that runs parallel to ours, neither past nor future, a different present. I decided to create this world in order to critique multiple power structures by building an intersection between past, present and potentially future political narratives.

Relation to Wider Context

Within this false world of Separate States, reality and simulation will become indistinguishable, as theorised by Jean Baudrillard in his text 'Simulacra and simulations', a key inspiration for this direction in my practice. Umberto Eco described this concept as that of the "authentic fake" not just the imitation of reality, but improving it. _

General thoughts

Mass media constructs reality rather than reflects it.

The film takes the concept of the eternal return to consider that all of our fates are pre destined, and that time is cyclical.

Mass media is so all encompassing in our lives that it has created a work where reality and simulation has become increasingly indistinguishable.

Influences

The Face of Another, 1966.– Directed by Hiroshi Teshigahara

World on a wire, 1973. -Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder

Code Unknown, 2000. – Directed by Michael Haneke

Werckmeister Harmonies, 2000. – Directed by Bela Tarr

Alphaville, 1965 – Directed by Jean Luc Godard.

Horse Money, 2014 – Directed by Pedro Costa

The Colour of Pomegranates, 1968. -Directed by Sergei Parajanov.

